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Governor

Roberta Gassman
Secretary



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Secretary Gassman Awards Safe Lift Grant for Healthcare Workers

More than \$32,700 awarded for training to prevent lift injuries at three area facilities

La Crosse – Department of Workforce Development Secretary Roberta Gassman today awarded a \$32,707 training grant to help prevent lift injuries for nurses and other healthcare workers and attendants at two hospitals in the Coulee Region and a nonprofit agency serving people with disabilities. Governor Jim Doyle launched the Safe Lifting Initiative for healthcare workers to promote a safe work environment, avoid labor shortages and help control rising costs for health care.

"Healthcare workers, especially nurses, are among workers at greatest risk of back injuries and Governor Doyle's Safe Lifting Initiative will help minimize that risk by providing training dollars," Secretary Gassman said. "Without the proper equipment and training, nurses can seriously injure themselves and their patients when lifting or moving patients. Everybody wins when we prevent such injuries – nurses, nursing assistants and others remain on the job and patients get the health care they need when they need it."

Secretary Gassman awarded the grant to Workforce Connections, Inc., which will collaborate in the training effort and provide \$20,000 to Black River Memorial Hospital in Black River Falls, \$7,508 to Gundersen Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse and \$5,199 to Riverfront, Inc., also in La Crosse.

"Wisconsin is known for providing quality health care," Governor Jim Doyle said. "Our hospitals and care facilities are nationally recognized and respected for the outstanding care provided by our highly-skilled health care professionals. We must provide a safe environment for our health care workers on the job and the patients in their care."

According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, six of the top ten occupations at highest risk for back injuries are in health care. Depending on the severity, such injuries can sideline workers temporarily or end their careers entirely. The risk of injuries can also discourage others from nursing or other health care careers at a time of labor shortages. These factors can increase the cost of worker's compensation and health care overall.

Gundersen Lutheran has a \$1.6 million injury prevention project underway. According to Safety Director Gary Brunslík, lift systems are being installed in the ceilings of hospital rooms to reduce staff injuries, and the hospital's share of the grant will be used for training. Black River Memorial Hospital is in the midst of an expansion project that includes a 21-bed unit. The project includes \$77,800 for lift equipment. The grant will be used to train staff in using new and existing equipment, Barb Carter, a physical therapist involved in safe lift training at the hospital.

Riverfront plans to use its grant to train staff assisting people with disabilities at its work and community center.

The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is using federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) money to fund the demonstration projects and train health care workers in proper lifting methods and equipment use. A safe lift environment means that health care workers do not lift, shift, or transfer patients manually without proper equipment.